



ILCEA

Revue de l'Institut des langues et cultures d'Europe,
Amérique, Afrique, Asie et Australie

51 | 2023

**La dimension interculturelle dans les médias
numériques**

The Construction of Mono- and Multilingual Identity Portrayals on Social Media: The Case of Instagram

*La construction de représentations identitaires monolingues et multilingues sur
les réseaux sociaux : le cas d'Instagram*

Vasilica Mocanu, Valeria González and Izaskun Elorza



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ilcea/17254>

DOI: 10.4000/ilcea.17254

ISSN: 2101-0609

Publisher

UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Printed version

ISBN: 978-2-37747-420-2

ISSN: 1639-6073

Electronic reference

Vasilica Mocanu, Valeria González and Izaskun Elorza, "The Construction of Mono- and Multilingual Identity Portrayals on Social Media: The Case of Instagram", *ILCEA* [Online], 51 | 2023, Online since 12 June 2023, connection on 27 October 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ilcea/17254> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ilcea.17254>

This text was automatically generated on October 27, 2023.

The text and other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

The Construction of Mono- and Multilingual Identity Portrayals on Social Media: The Case of Instagram

La construction de représentations identitaires monolingues et multilingues sur les réseaux sociaux : le cas d'Instagram

Vasilica Mocanu, Valeria González and Izaskun Elorza

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Research funding

Development of disciplinary literacies in English as a lingua franca at university – (LIDISELF) – PID2019-107451GB-I00. Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades.

Acknowledgements

We would like to kindly thank Arya Muñoz Aragón for the translation into French of the article's abstract.

1. Introduction

- 1 Language has been widely considered a key element in the performing and display of identities and in the construction of our individuality. According to Joseph, “[i]dentities are manifested in language as, first, the categories and labels that people attach to themselves and others to signal their belonging; second, as the indexed ways of speaking and through which they perform their belonging; and third, as the interpretations that others make of those indices” (2016: 19). Norton defines ‘identity’ as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (2013: 45).

- 2 However, in an era of rapidly evolving international interdependence, extant research has not fully caught up with the effect that globalizing processes on the use of language, the performing of identities, and the connection between them. Elsewhere, Blommaert (2010) alludes to the fact that even if globalization has always characterized our societies, the scale and speed of globalizing processes are such that we need to reassess their effect on the social and linguistic conditions of our world.
- 3 One of the early effects of this increased speed of globalizing processes has been the rise of the necessity to learn a foreign language and the increased interest in intercultural learning in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. Morgan & Byram, 2004). In light of these events, at the beginning of the 21st century, it was absolutely exceptional that in Europe children were not taught English at school, and study abroad became almost a must, giving shape to the so-called “generation Erasmus”, higher education European students who went to study abroad and settled in a third identity-space between an expat and a migrant.
- 4 Nonetheless, the increase in bilingual repertoires where English is usually the second language has also received criticisms from linguists who claim that producing fluid English language users, and thereby flexible workers, merely responds to neoliberal agendas that aim at producing subjects that fit in the political and economic context (e.g. Flores, 2013). And, while more research is needed to understand the dynamics between multilingual repertoires and the economy, what is clear is that multilingualism, together with an increase in human mobility triggered ways to construct identities that are new and should be treated as such.
- 5 In a large number of studies, this phenomenon has been analyzed in relation to migrants (e.g. Pavlenko, 2004). On the other hand, more recent studies, such as Mocanu (2019) focus on the relationship between identities and multilingual repertoires constructed through language learning processes in study abroad programs.

1.1. Language, identity and social media

- 6 The rise of social media has opened the possibility to engage in identity construction by accessing communities that were impossible to approach before, opening the fore to new avenues for self-representation. Research on this matter has confirmed the importance of the social factor for the online construction of identity. As Baldauf, Develotte and Ollagnier-Beldame explain, the construction of identity on social media is intrinsically related to otherness, that is, it is construed through the negotiation of shared norms and values through communication:

As a member of a social network, users position themselves first with regards to this social network: they express themselves, comment, support opinions based on the standards, values and habits of this network [...] These norms and values are not clearly set down; they are constantly renegotiated in exchanges between members. The user can also try to stand out and highlight what makes him/her “unique” [...]. Second, members of a social network position themselves with regard to people who do not belong to the network: friends/connections/followers, etc. are the “we” as opposed to a more or less well-defined “you” [...]. The social network’s software also determines the way one joins a group by simple request and/or a single click by the individual and a “click” of acceptance on the other side. The software makes it just as easy to get out of a relationship or network. (2017: 12)

- 7 In this sense, the means by which this negotiation of values is exercised are conditioned by the social platform itself. Zappavigna (2014) has explored how some of these communities are created through ambient affiliation, that is, the users' contributions in mass performances, hashtags or memes creation. By analyzing a 100-million-word corpus of Twitter posts that were related to three kinds of bonds (self-deprecation, frazzle, and addiction), the author demonstrated the significant role that the sharing of values within an online community had regarding the construction of the users' identity. In a more recent study, Zeng and Abidin (2021) provide evidence that younger generations often consider social media as a safe place to express themselves and assert their identities online through elements like memes.
- 8 While the means through which messages are communicated on social media can be multimodal (texts, videos, memes, pictures), one single thing characterizes them all: they are all transmitted by means of one or various languages. Therefore, whenever Instagram users decide to publish a post, they automatically display who they are and who they wish to be perceived as through their language choices.
- 9 Taking this into consideration, Lee (2014) studies the language choices and self-representation that Hong Kong students made and displayed on social media, concluding that participants were able to project certain existing aspects of their identities, 'writing' their lives on these platforms in considerably complex and dynamic ways. Their language choices online are shaped by certain factors such as their self-image, their previous linguistic practices, and how they wanted to be seen by their followers. In this sense, language choices become a tool for identity management that changes depending on the audience, that is, the imagined community to which they appeal. Similar conclusions are reached in a study by Dressler and Dressler, who show how a novice L2 (second language) learner in study abroad "chooses to use the L2 in social media posts to assert her new linguistic identity, recording successes, challenges, and observations, with little concern for her audience's comprehension" (2016: 40).
- 10 In relation to the analysis of the attitudes and observations that users express online, recent research has benefited from having almost unlimited testimonies of people from all over the world that provide valuable information about the construction of identities and discourse. For instance, in a systematic analysis of 440 Instagram posts, Karageorgou (2020) mixes the technologies of corpus analysis with discourse analysis to understand the construction of female fitness identities online.
- 11 In another study, Gervasio and Karuri (2019) explore how university students mark their identities through language on WhatsApp. The authors conclude that employing convergence in their conversations—that is, the use of multimodal languages, a peculiar register, or linguistic forms that index a certain persona, allows them to perform their identities. In addition, the findings of this study show that users often put away their personal or subgroup identity for the mainstream one, because it is the most suitable to form an in-group identity. Solidarity and politeness are also key in their interactions, due to students converging and diverging in their texts for solidarity purposes, ending up marking a distinct group identity. On the same note, Biro (2019) signals language choices, code-switching, and hybrid practices as key elements for the construction of multilingual identities on Facebook.
- 12 On the premise that social media has opened new avenues for the creation and display of identity through language, the present study focuses on the online space offered by

the social media app Instagram in order to explore how multilingual and monolingual identity portrayals are constructed through social-media posts. The platform was chosen due to the fact that it is one of the main social platforms for Millennials and GenZ individuals and because of its extended use of hashtags, which facilitates the process of tracking the posts.

2. Methodology

- 13 This study uses a mixed methods design, otherwise referred to as the “third research paradigm” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 15) or the “third methodological movement” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003: 5), which has been defined by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner as: “[...] the type of research in which a researcher or a team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (2007: 123).
- 14 This research method was specifically chosen because it allows us to explore the different portrayals of monolingualism and multilingualism on Instagram from a qualitative perspective, while enabling us to draw conclusions from the quantification of the data.
- 15 The qualitative analysis has been conducted through thematic analysis, that is, the identification, organization and explanation of meaningful semantic and latent themes in the data so as to address the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017: 3353). Given the inductive character of this study, the flexibility that this method offers, along with the possibility for the categories to be quantified, it seemed the most useful to approach our research aim. On the other side, it has been decided to employ corpus-assisted analysis, in order to identify both regularities (and exceptions) in language and hegemonic discourses while making sure of reducing the researcher bias (Baker, 2006: 10).

2.1. Data collection and analysis

- 16 The corpus was built through the collection of 100 Instagram. This amount of posts would allow us to perform the thematic analysis and also to obtain valuable information from the corpus analysis of the posts selected in accordance with the rationale that they had to be included in the hashtags #monolingualism or #monolingual. Initially, it was planned to conduct a comparison between the posts that appeared under the hashtags #monolingualism/ #monolingual and #multilingualism/ #multilingual. However, after an exploratory investigation of the results obtained for the approach first hashtags, which mixed a variety of topics not related with the aims of the study, it appeared more reasonable to focus on these two, given that they were significantly more manageable (i.e. their number was considerably reduced) than those related to multilingualism.
- 17 The data collection produced a corpus of 10,765 tokens which where firstly examined through thematic analysis following the procedure established in Maguire and Delahunt (2017): familiarization with the data, the generation of initial codes, the search for themes, a review of the preliminary themes and the definition and

refinement of those themes. At the same time, the corpus was annotated according to those preliminary themes.

- 18 The processes of annotation of the corpus and thematic analysis took place simultaneously. It consisted of the labelling of every topic that arose regarding monolingualism and multilingualism in the posts. The criteria chosen in tagging the corpus were the following:
1. A theme/tag consisted of the whole sentence or bunch of sentences from which a certain topic arose. In the cases in which themes tangled in the same sentence, both were considered valid;
 2. Considering this was a preliminary phase of the thematic analysis, every topic that arose in relation to linguistics, identity, language learning, or related social matters was taken into account. Similarly, topics related to feelings, emotions, positive or negative values were also labelled, considering the use of emojis part of the expression of these categories.
- 19 In addition, the corpus was processed with the software AntConc (Anthony, 2019), a freeware corpus analysis toolkit. The principal tools employed in the analysis were: word-lists (a list of all the different words in the corpus which provides the relative rank of each word according to its total frequency in the corpus); clusters and n-grams (tools that provide different types of multi-word units in the corpus; KWIC (a tool that displays keywords in their context) and concordances (a tool that provides a visualization of all the occurrences of a search word and its surrounding co-text in the corpus, so that regular patterns can be searched of the use of the word, including its most frequent collocations). This information would not only enable us to determine the frequency of occurrence of the thematic categories established in the annotation process, but also to understand the linguistic choices made to talk about them, that is, the aboutness and indicatory character of words and phrases in relation to certain attitudes and discourses. On the other hand, by examining the posts made by multilingual younger users, we were able to perform a deeper qualitative analysis on the construction of their identities online.
- 20 The results obtained through the corpus analysis software were processed with Excel in order to quantify the phenomenon. At this stage of the research, the definition and refinement of the preliminary themes took place, and the following four main categories were identified: 1) negative topics on monolingualism / multilingualism, 2) feelings on monolingualism / multilingualism, 3) embodiment of monolingualism / multilingualism, and 4) research-related topics.

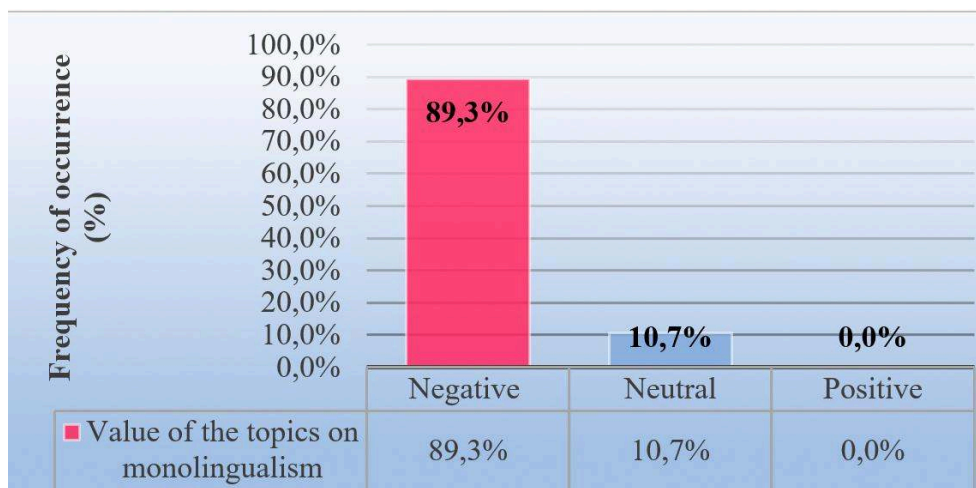
3. Results and discussion

3.1. Monolingualism vs Multilingualism – assigned value

- 21 A first approach to the corpus was analyzing the frequency of the occurrence of topics related to multilingualism and monolingualism and their assigned value, that is, whether the themes were positive, negative, or neutral. The categories were created attending to both the emotional effect that the post has on the reader and the attitude of the author in relation to the subject. Thus, positive topics are those which contain words/sentences with a positive sentiment attached to them. Negative topics, on the contrary, contain words/sentences with a negative sentiment attached, while neutral topics contain words/sentences that do not imply any emotions.

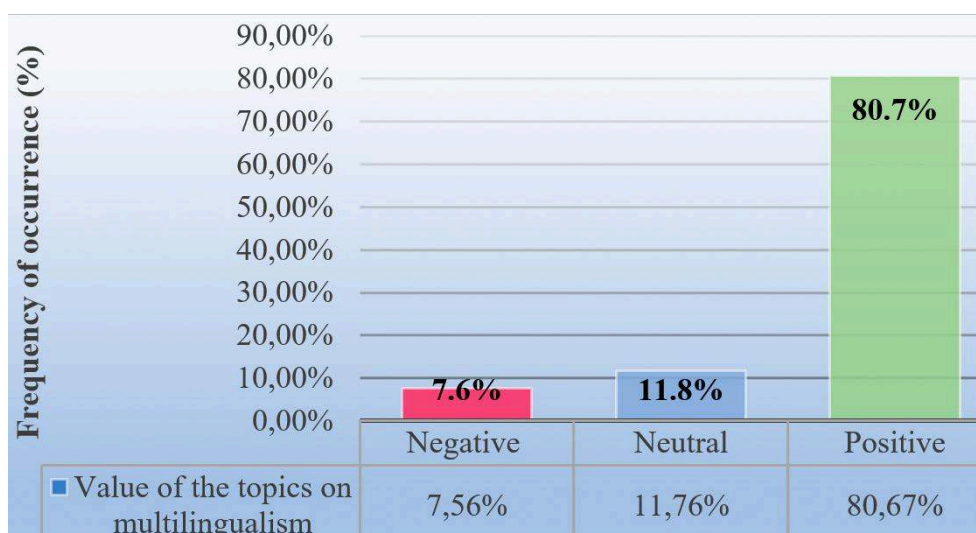
- 22 As can be seen in Figure 1, neutral topics towards monolingualism constitute only 10.7% of the monolingual-related topics in the sample, while negative topics towards monolingualism constitute 89.3% of the topics that arose. Therefore, not only the majority of the discourses towards monolingual identities had an unfavorable vision of it, but also, these types of discourses were much more likely to appear in the posts.

Figure 1. – Monolingualism-related topics: frequency of occurrence in the corpus.



- 23 In reference to multilingualism (Figure 2), the analysis reveals that positive topics represent 80.7% of topics related to multilingualism in the sample. On the other side, neutral topics towards multilingual identities have a rate of appearance of 11.8% in the corpus, being negative topics the least frequent, with a 7.6%.

Figure 2. – Multilingualism-related topics: frequency of occurrence in the corpus.



- 24 Consequently, a considerable difference can be observed in relation to the type of value that is assigned to the topics related to monolingualism and multilingualism in the posts. The results indicate that Instagram users post content that in the vast majority of cases is favorable towards multilingualism. The tendency is reversed in the case of monolingualism, with a vast majority of the posts showing animosity towards monolingual identities. Finally, it is important to mention that the neutral value

category gathers mostly those posts related to research, which we deliberately decided to include under this label, even though in some cases, it showed indirect hints towards more positive results of the research on multilingualism.

3.2. Monolingualism vs Multilingualism: related topics

- 25 In order to examine how monolingualism and multilingualism were portrayed in the posts, the recurrent topics related to each of them have been thematically categorized. Figures 3 and 4 below show the recurrent themes related to monolingualism and multilingualism correspondingly, as well as their frequency of occurrence in the posts:

Figure 3. – Frequency of monolingualism-related topics.

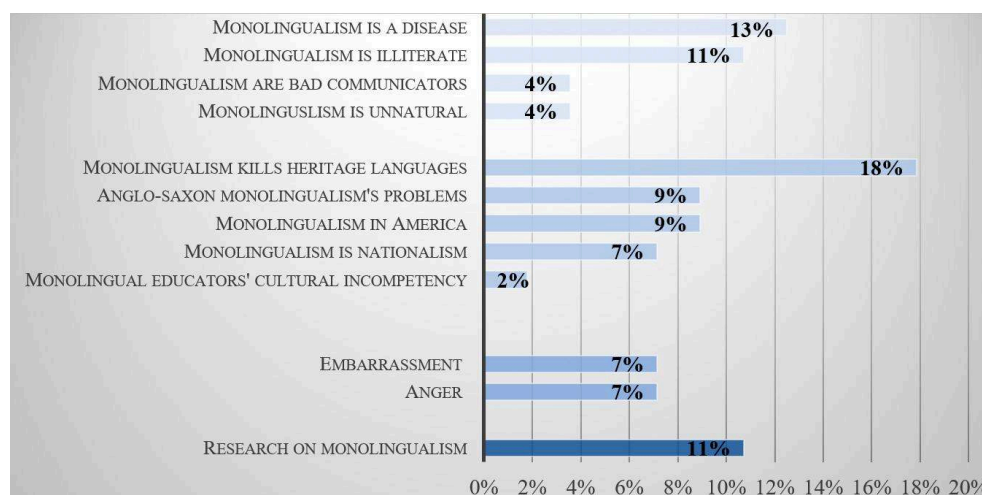
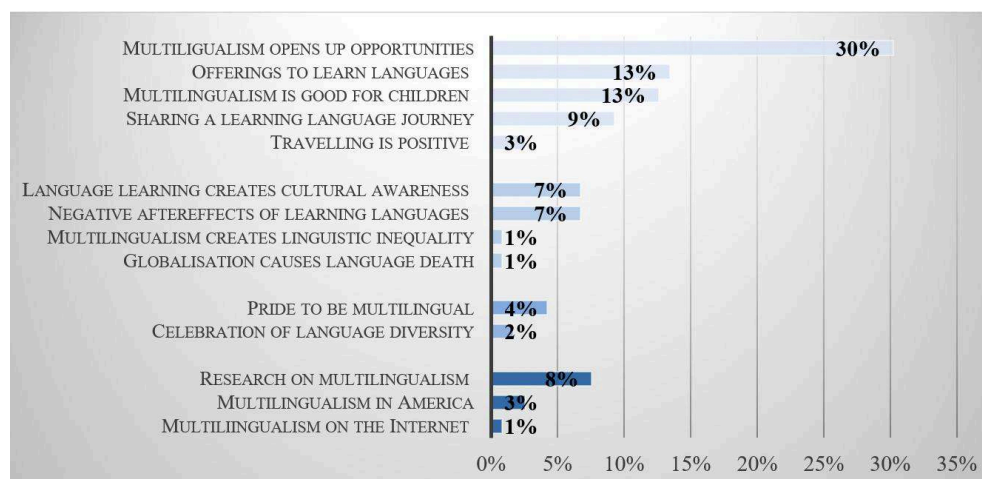


Figure 4. – Frequency of multilingualism-related topics.



- 26 According to their frequency of occurrence, recurrent themes were divided into four different thematic categories: 1) embodiment of mono/multilingualism; 2) social and sociolinguistic-related issues of multi/monolingualism; 3) feelings related to mono/multilingualism; and 4) neutral topics related to mono/multilingualism, as can be observed in Figures 5 and 6 below.

Figure 5. – Monolingualism – thematic analysis diagram.

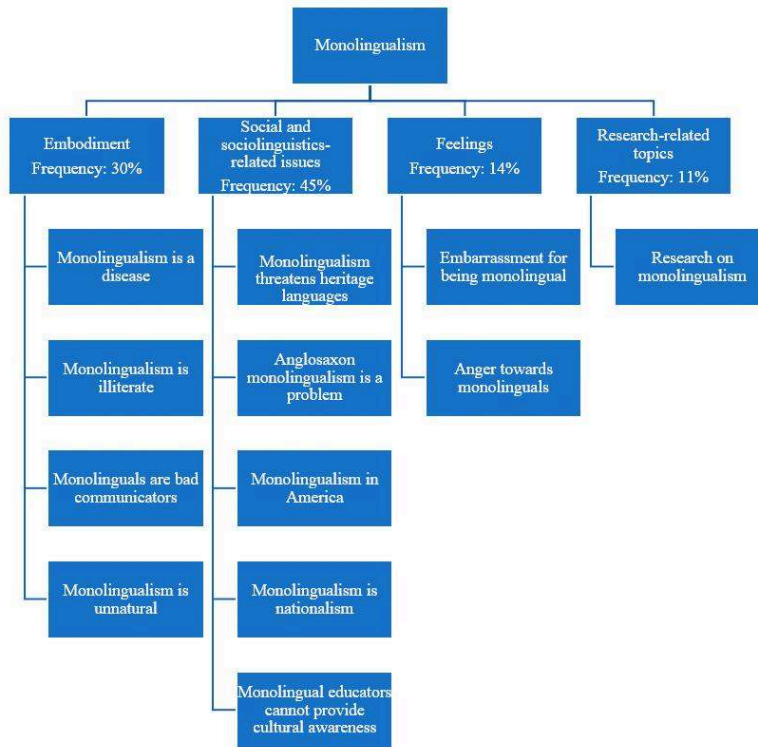
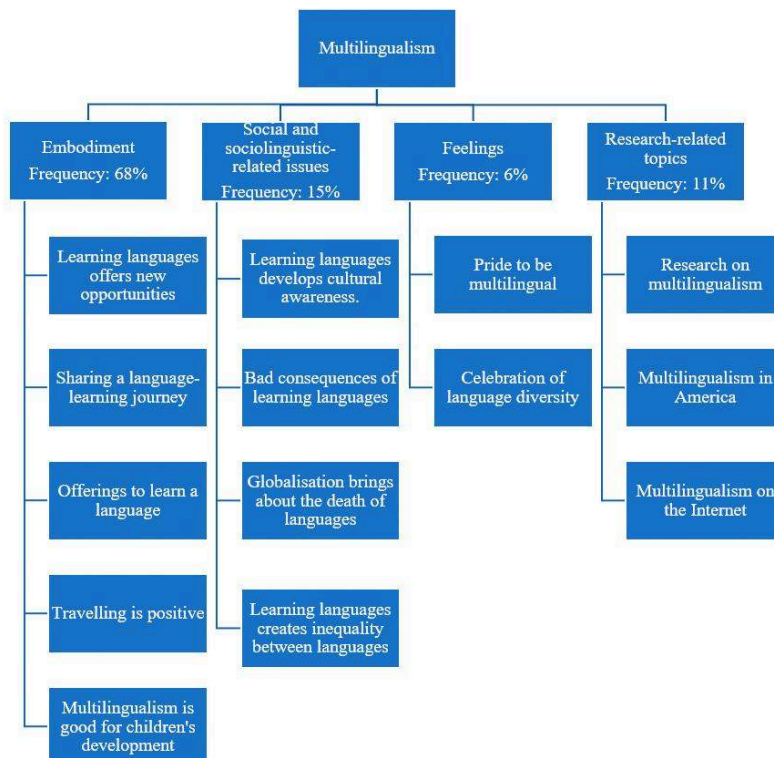


Figure 6. – Multilingualism – thematic analysis diagram.



3.2.1. Embodiment of multi/monolingualism

27 Monolingualism and multilingualism were often perceived by the Instagram users through the means of strong and clear portrayals. This category is constituted of the themes that attributed qualities of an intrinsic character to both linguistic repertoires. They constitute 30% of the posts related to monolingualism and 68% of the posts related to multilingualism. The portrayal of monolingualism in the posts was often constructed through ideas with a negative value. The most prominent subcategory was the embodiment of monolingualism as a disease (Ellis, 2006). According to this view, monolingualism is a very dangerous illness for the society and world peace, so it must be eradicated. Hence, the cure for this disease is expanding our linguistic repertoire. It was not striking to find this kind of discourse in the posts given that this metaphor has been promoted in the past decades to enhance multilingualism in the society. However, it was interesting to observe how this conceptual metaphor was employed on social media. In what follows, specific examples will be given to illustrate the themes that appeared in the posts. The posts are presented with the original grammatical and spelling errors, and the emojis are included. For a more concise and straightforward illustration, the examples are mostly excerpts of the posts. Notice also that the words that exemplifies better the phenomenon have been underlined and bolded.

Example 1:

2 out of 3 Americans suffer from monolingualism, but there is a cure, as this bookmark from a 2010 language event reminds us. (@dragoninknots)

Example 2:

Read our blog on our website - Why our monolingualism will hurt British business post-Brexit. (@achintegrates)

Example 3:

Monolingualism is a curable deseas. Be polyglottal, be curious! (@noemimeansgioia)

28 As we can observe in the examples above, this cognitive metaphor is often embodied through the use of health-related terms and predicates related to the semantic field of pain. Furthermore, the consequences of this pathology not only affect the individual, by diminishing their cognitive capacities and limiting their lives, but it is also considered responsible for major social damage (Example 2), thus affecting individuals and business alike, in this case.

29 Another embodiment of monolingualism is that monolinguals are illiterate. This subcategory encompasses both literal quotations from users arguing that monolingualism equals lack of education (Example 4), and criticism from multilinguals who complain about the ignorance of monolinguals in dealing with other cultures or linguistic identities (Example 5).

Example 4:

If you're like us, you know that #monolingualism is the #illiteracy of the 21st century. (@iace_language)

Example 5:

like you speak ONE FUCKING LANGUAGE and you're telling me that learning languages is a waste of time and judging my grammar or pronunciation in OTHER languages??? like if you tell them to say something in Spanish you won't even understand what they're saying. (@polyglot.problems)

- 30 Thus, monolingual identities are portrayed not only as illiterate but also as individuals without cultural literacy, and thus, with a very limited cultural awareness.
- 31 The minor topic of “Monolinguals are bad communicators” is connected to this previous idea about monolingual’s illiteracy, since it considers monolingual people illiterate in terms of communicating with others. In not being in contact with other cultures, they are depicted as individuals who mostly lack the capacity of being flexible with non-native people and their linguistic resources are often insufficient to successfully communicate with other people. The last sub-theme, “Monolingualism is unnatural” encompasses discourses that try to tear down the settled idea that monolingualism is the natural norm in all cultures, and multilingualism is a social construct. At the same time, this theme shows a connection to the biological conditions of natural and unnatural states of living beings. Taken together with constant references to disease and the need of eradication, it seems to be fashioned in an almost Darwinist way: in Instagram posts, natural selection bets on multilingualism.
- 32 On the other hand, the embodiment of multilingualism in the posts is shaped through more complex subcategories. The most prominent one is “Learning languages offers new opportunities”. This is the most outstanding theme (taking both monolingualism and multilingualism-related topics into account) in the whole corpus. This sub-category consists of a collection of claims related to the benefits of investing in language learning (Example 6). These advantages are attached not only to the personal level, but also to the cognitive and social consequences of learning languages. Here we can find, mostly, the so-called cognitive benefits of learning languages (e.g. Barac & Bialystoc, 2011). Testimonies of how learning languages leads to identity transformations: you develop confidence and transform your social relations are likewise included (Example 7).

Example 6:

The Spanish language is gaining demand in today’s modern world. A lot of **new opportunities** are opening up for people who can speak Spanish fluently. (@skill.live.international)

Example 7:

Learning languages builds community with **empathy** and **understanding** at its root.

It encourages students to study languages which allows them to grow their **cognitive abilities**.

It prepares students for a wide **range of sought-after 21st century skills**.

And it’s a **neat party trick** to count how many languages you can have conversations in (@multilingualri)

- 33 The themes “Sharing a language learning journey” and “Offering to learn a language” were intrinsically related to one another, and they are often connected to “Learning languages offers new opportunities”. The first category consists of testimonies from people who share their current or former process of learning languages. These are mostly written in first person and the content of the posts varies from sharing a language learning schedule (Example 8), to identity-related discourses about how language learning has changed the individuals behind the posts and to personal experiences or preferences towards languages.

Example 8:

NEW COMMITMENT!

For the next 12 months I will only be reading in Spanish!

August 1st to July 31st 2023.

-

I want to document how this commitment impacts my learning, as I am snails pace at best and NO ME GUSTA and something needs to change! (Obvs that's me and **my terrible consistency** 😊)

Let's face it I'm terrible at commitments, consistency and updates but I'm going to do my best to ensure I meet and (hopefully) exceed my language goals with regular updates here.

I'm really excited to try this and look forward to attempting little updates in Spanish and it will be lovely to look back on in a year's time and see what's changed. Ya never know I might even be able to crack out a funky reel by the end of this challenge 😊 (@themothertongue)

- 34 This type of discourses, especially those related to identity changes and the advantages of learning languages, are often tied up with invitations to learn a foreign language, which are simply expressions of encouragement to start or continue with a language learning process (Example 9):

Example 9:

~2022~

-

Looking back, the year of 2021 was fairly successful for **me** in the area of language learning. And it's time for me to set my **goals for 2022**.

-

My goal was to be B1 in German last year, which I believe I managed to reach! This year I want to get to B2. With a bit of hard work I should be able to reach this goal. I might write a certificate – however I will see if I can afford it. Learning 5 words per day should be a manageable goal, even when I'm busy.

-

As for Finnish, I wanted to be A2 which **I didn't successfully reach...** however this year I won't measure my Finnish success with levels. I want to have a conversation 15-20 minutes long and I want to read an entire book. I will probably use a dictionary a lot but it's just something I want to try and step out of my comfort zone. I will focus on my vocabulary and output, however grammar won't be forgotten at all.

-

So these are my goals and plans. **What are YOUR plans for 2022?** 😊 (@langs.goals)

- 35 Regarding the sub-theme “Travelling is positive”, it was observed that travelling is often inherently related to multilingualism and its benefits in the posts, because it enhances directly the development of multilingual identities at the same time that it is expected to trigger cultural awareness:

Example 10:

Mindful travel. I love that ThaiAirways has a segment of Mindful Travel as an option for inflight reading/ education.

I find that travel really gives me the space and opportunities to call on my practice. On this particular journey, I have become aware of the privilege that I have to travel. Privilege as an educated, white person from the United States, privilege in having the time, freedom, and finances to make this trip possible; and the privilege I have as an English speaker. I am so grateful to have **this opportunity to see more of the world and I don't take this lightly**.

Along those lines, in my recent travels, I have become **hyper aware of my monolingualism**. The more I travel and meet people from all over [the world], the more aware and embarrassed I feel that I only speak English. I love meeting new people and hearing all the languages that they speak. In each country I visit I make it a point to learn how to say “hello” and “thank you”. I know it's not much, but I believe it's **important to connect with people in their native tongue**, even if it's just a word or two. (@stefaniesjoyfuljourney)

- 36 One of the most prominent and surprising themes in relation to the embodiment of multilingualism is “Multilingualism is good for children’s development”. It gathers the testimonies of parents who share their experience in raising bilingual or multilingual kids and try to debunk myths (such as, for instance, that it causes speech delays); or simply people sharing the benefits that learning languages have for children (Example 11 and Example 12):

Example 11:

Have you wondered if being exposed to/learning multiple languages as a child will delay speech development? X **This a common misconception**

Research supports the idea that learning multiple languages does not contribute to an expressive language delay. If total vocabulary in both languages are considered, bilingual speakers are often on par or above monolingual peers (@therapiesforsuccess)

Example 12:

[...] **With my for example**, I have notice[d] that (at the tender age only 18 months) has already started busting these **myths**. Her language developed never have been delayed and she never was confused by the different Languages. She didn’t think that “Vaca ” and “Kuh ” 🐄 are just two versions of the same thing, but implicitly she knew that these words belong to different languages.

[...] **With our toddler** we are having a completely new scenario:

our in-laws have raised some **concerns about Lorenzo’s languages development**.

He is 2.5 years old and he only speaks [a] few words. Mostly in . People say we should talk to him in one language better! But I know he can at least distinguish between the two languages () and respond accordingly. This shows that languages can co- exist and there is no need to focus in one language first. [...] (@dolcessori)

3.2.2. Social and sociolinguistic issues related to mono/multilingualism

- 37 This category comprises the themes related to social issues, that is, the topics that establish a relationship between these two linguistic identities (monolingual and multilingual) and the society. Topics related to this category account for 45% in the case of monolingualism and constitute a lower percentage of 15% in the case of the posts related to multilingualism.
- 38 With respect to monolingualism, we find the sub-themes: “Monolingualism threatens heritage languages”, “Anglo-Saxon monolingualism is a problem”, “Monolingualism is nationalism”, “Monolingualism in America” and “Monolingual teachers cannot provide cultural awareness”.
- 39 The first sub-theme: “Monolingualism threatens heritage languages” encompasses every statement that hints, whether explicitly or implicitly, at monolingualism being the reason why people lose their heritage languages (Example 13). Thus, it seems that for some, adopting a monolingual identity, willingly or not, leads to the loss of their heritage language, or of certain skills in these languages.

Example 13:

A phenomenon that often occurs in immigrant families: children who grow up understanding but not speaking the family’s heritage language.

There are several reasons this could happen – perhaps the child feels that **speaking only the majority/community language will help them to fit in better** with their peers or maybe **the child doesn’t get enough exposure** to the heritage language and no longer feel[s] motivated to keep speaking it or maybe they want to

avoid attracting attention of onlookers when they start speaking another language. [...]

Attending school is often a turning point, when maintaining the heritage language becomes more difficult as the majority of the day is now spent in the community-language environment.

Let's combat #monolingualism together by promoting the benefits, practice, and normalcy of #multilingualism, speaking #mothertongues, and preserving #heritagelanguages. (@authorelizamgarza)

- 40 “Anglo-Saxon monolingualism is a problem” and “Monolingualism is nationalism” are two sub-themes that appeared as closely related. This type of discourses considered that monolingualism is often an instrument used by different governmental institutions in order to preserve the national identity of a country (Example 14).

Example 14:

Speaking native English is seen to have advantages in multilingual settings, but recent research from members of @bilingualismatters_lu Luxembourg shows some can experience less beneficial pigeonholing or even a “**monolingual cringe**”. (@bilingualismatters)

- 41 The former includes statements that point out to an unhealthy relationship between English-speaking countries with monolingualism because of the current use of English as a Lingua Franca. In this category, we find complaints and mocks towards native English speakers (Example 15) but also, warnings about how Anglo-Saxon monolingualism has terrible consequences towards other cultures (Example 15):

Example 15:

In the 18th and 19th centuries, authors and intellectuals in the English language dominated several languages, all of them knew Latin and French –by education– and quite a few others a second modern language (German, Italian, Spanish). Today, a **large part of the Anglo-Saxon writers only know English**. I believe that **the consequences that this Anglo-Saxon monolingualism** has had and still has on global culture have not yet been analyzed or studied in all its depth and breadth. (@diegomoldes)

- 42 “Monolingualism in America” is also related to these topics. It consists of discourses that link being American to being monolingual and watch in disapproval the consequences that it has with regards to other cultures (Example 16 and Example 17):

Example 16:

If you are **American, prove me wrong**: how many languages do you speak? 😊 (@thediegonaut)

Example 17:

[...] **The United States contains over 350 languages, yet 75% of the population is monolingual**. This piece uses the most visible American symbol, our flag, to celebrate American's hidden diversity of language.

Far too often, the American flag is used as a **nationalistic litmus test**. At first glance, this piece may be seen as yet another display of problematic nationalism. It is only once someone reads the fine print (quite literally) that they will see our **nation's strength comes from our diversity, not divisive homogeneity** [...] (@visiblelanguages2019)

- 43 Lastly, the minor theme of this category is “Monolingual educators cannot provide cultural awareness”. This topic alludes directly to teacher identities and comprises discourses that consider monolingual teachers inadequate to provide knowledge on cultural diversity to student, as in the following example:

Example 18:

Classrooms are becoming more and more diverse (not only in the GCC), and institutions shouldn't afford anymore a **majority of monolingual educators** who often **bring unidirectional worldviews**. In my opinion, students' experiences are acknowledged and respected by hiring well-prepared multilingual and multicultural educators who can build on the existing complexity of today's classrooms and world. These educators are found in every single country; and institutions should do their homework and reach out to the best in their fields. The same applies, of course, to administrators, consultants, and trainers working across the education sector. It's time for more diversity. (@laila_familiar)

- 44 Regarding multilingualism, the most outstanding sub-theme within this category is "Learning languages provides cultural awareness". It encompasses the perks that speaking multiple languages produce in our cultural knowledge, our sensitivity in the interaction with members of other cultural groups, as well as our ability to manage ourselves in culturally different ways. In spite of the fact that this category could have been included within the benefits of learning languages, given the intricate nature of the discourses that orbited around this topic, it seemed more appropriate to create a different category (Example 19 and Example 20):

Example 19:

Problem was there were too many references to British colloquialisms and idioms. It was a different language. **I felt excluded. It was my job to fix this language problem.**

Hang on. Why should I be the only one to 'fix' this problem? Why should I be expected to speak British English when I didn't expect them to speak Malaysian English? I wasn't planning to live in the UK. I was only here for university, a hub of multi nationalities, for 4 short years.

No. What we needed was to meet halfway. To speak a 3rd language - International English stripped of all culture-specific references. I helped my British friends become aware of this 3rd language. To fix this problem TOGETHER.

Next time you're with your monolingual- speaking colleague, tell them that there is a 3rd language. And that you'll teach them how to speak it. (@englishwithatwist)

Example 20:

For the record, I grew up speaking English but understanding Tagalog (Filipino). Later in life, I decided to learn Spanish. Because of having some language knowledge of these three languages, I have **access to a plethora of cultural experiences and nuances the average monoglot may not have access to.** (@thekevinbaculi)

- 45 The sub-theme "Bad consequences of learning languages" includes mostly topics related to the considerable amount of investment that learning a language requires, but also, consequences for multilingual kids and, ultimately, social consequences of learning languages.

Example 21:

There are approximately 1500 to 2000 different #African #languages on the continent.

When a language dies, a significant part of the culture dies with it. Because of the level of #globalization, the indigenous people have either been **forced to abandon their native language** or end up losing it. It's estimated that at least half of the 6000+ languages spoken on Earth are in danger of extinction.

Language is the fulcrum and axis of any culture and identity of any individual. It is the definition of humankind and what surrounds them. **The preservation of culture is passed on across generations by word of mouth, through language.**

(@thetimesofafrica)

Example 22:

This attitude is typical of people born in **smaller “low-profile” countries**. If you want to matter then you must speak the lanaguge [sic] of the **key players**.

And the key players naturally do not really see the point in learning the languages [sic] of the smaller players. If the need and the exposure – two core conditions for language acquisition are not granted, then even the strongest motivation might not be sufficient. (@langolux)

- 46 Other minor themes associated to this category are “Globalization brings about the death of languages” and “Learning languages creates inequality between languages”. These two are very similar sub-themes because they share the same perspective of minority languages. However, the first one argues that, in an age of globalization, choosing to be monolingual is key to preserving one’s culture (Example 21); while the latter complains about the high-profile languages. In other words, choosing to learn major languages enhances the death of low-profile languages (Example 22).

3.2.3. Feelings in relation to mono/multilingualism

- 47 This category is related to the emotions that appear in the posts towards monolingualism and multilingualism. It accounts for 14% of the monolingualism-related posts and for a lower percentage of multilingualism-related ones (6%). Regarding monolingualism, posts are connected to two emotions, both of them negative: anger (Example 23) and embarrassment (Example 24). Instagram users express anger against monolinguals, as can be observed in the following lines (Example 25):

Example 23:

Why would you waste everyone’s time and answer a question like this? 😡😡

The only purpose I can think of behind this is to try to make someone feel bad for choosing to use their native language. 😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡 (@baconphoenix)

Example 24:

Along those lines, in my recent travels, I have become hyper aware of my monolingualism. The more I travel and meet people from all over, the more **aware and embarrassed I feel** that I only speak English. (@stefaniesjoyfuljourney)

- 48 On the other hand, and in a much different fashion, pride and feelings of celebration towards language diversity were the main emotions related to multilingualism (Examples 25 and 26):

Example 25:

And most importantly, I looked back and saw the huge progress I’ve made in the past year. How much I’ve managed to learn. **And I have to say, I’m proud of myself**. It might sound a bit egoist, but I’m just celebrating my progress 😊 (@langs.goals)

Example 26:

After the last reflection I posted, I thought for a while about the social difficulties of people who speak a minority language and do not fit anywhere.

Some may feel as strangers in their own speaker community, due to lack of acceptance or authenticity, or because they do not share the same vision of the future of the language and territory.

Others may feel like outsiders among their friends or family, because they do not care about their language as much as they do, or because they see them affected by

the national ideologies that aim for a monolingual country.
 And some may feel weird in both circles, in between worlds...
 Independently or where you fit, this goes for you all, with much love
We resist (@minoritylanguaging2)

3.2.4. Research-related themes

- 49 This last category encompasses those themes which report on the results of research related to mono- or multilingualism, whose presence is rather reduced. Even though in certain cases these topics also show subtle traces of an inclination towards mono- or multilingualism and because their positioning was indirect and difficult to grasp, they were deliberately grouped as neutral, based on the alleged objectivity of research studies. One subcategory that is shared for both linguistic identities is the allusion to research in the posts. Example 27 below shows a post related to the sub-category “Research on multilingualism”:

Example 27:

According to a study by the University of Chicago, bilingual children tend to understand language and grammar better than monolingual children. That is because they have to learn to separate their two languages, making them more attuned to their language patterns.

The study also found that bilingual children tend to be more empathetic and better at problem-solving than monolingual children. (@bilingualnestny)

- 50 In spite of the difficulty to grasp what the intentions behind these posts is, we suspect that the direct reference to academic authorities might be a way to support and give credibility to the content of the posts.

4. Concluding remarks

- 51 This study aimed to shed light on how monolingual and multilingual identity portrayals were constructed through content that was posted on the social-media platform Instagram. In this respect, the results show a general trend towards depicting monolinguals and monolingualism in a negative way. The reversed trend can be observed for the variables “multilingual / multilingualism”. In this case, the vast majority of posts construct multilingual identities in a positive way.
- 52 The thematic analysis of the posts showed that they were related to four categories: 1) embodiment of mono- and multilingualism; 2) social and sociolinguistic issues related to mono- and multilingualism; 3) feelings towards mono- and multilingualism; and 4) research topics related to mono- and multilingualism. In spite of the fact that the posts could be grouped in these categories, their frequency of appearance, as well as their value (positive, negative, neutral) are highly dependent on whether they are related to multilingualism or monolingualism. Because research-related topics did not adopt a specifically subjective position towards one variable or the other, the first three will be considered in the following lines.
- 53 In the first place, when it comes to embodiment, the results show frequent allusions to disease, a need of eradication, and even a biologically unnatural essence of monolingualism. At the same time, allusions to illiteracy and a lack of cultural awareness are present within this category when monolinguals are considered. On the other hand, multilingualism is embodied by empathy, openness, and tolerance to

cultural and linguistic differences. Interestingly, allusions to natural development of cognitive abilities are also mentioned in the posts, contrasting with the “unnatural” essence of monolingualism.

- 54 In relation to the second category: social and sociolinguistic issues related to mono- and multilingualism, the type of content that users post is different in quantity and nature. On the one hand, monolingualism appears as a cuckoo which threatens heritage languages. Monolingual people’s identities are also equated with nationalistic subjectivities. Two categories that were related to countries within the inner circle of native speakers of English also surfaced: Anglo-Saxon monolingualism is seen as problematic and monolingualism in America is assigned the same label. Finally, one of the most outstanding themes within this category emerges from the attributes that are assigned to monolingual teachers and their alleged social consequences. In this light, monolingual teacher identities are described as narrow-minded and as unable to respond to the social needs of their students who inhabit “a superdiverse world” (Blommaert, 2010). On the other hand, multilingual individuals are depicted as culturally aware and sensitive subjects. Managing a multilingual repertoire appears as a key which opens the door to a multiplicity of social and cultural experiences. However, this category also gathers two negative themes that are related to the spread of multilingualism: globalization triggering the death of languages and language learning as a creator of inequality between languages. Both types of posts are clearly related to the hierarchy that is established by neoliberal trends, which determine learners to invest in languages that are considered to return economic rewards and leave aside minor languages, whose value on the market is seen as low.
- 55 The third category collects feelings towards mono- and multilingualism. In this case, an interesting trend is observed: feelings are of two types, according to their direction. On the one hand, there are feelings towards monolinguals / monolingualism and multilinguals / multilingualism. On the other hand, some users posted feelings that are self-directed. Two feelings appear in the posts related to monolingual identities: anger and embarrassment. While anger is mostly related to the outside, embarrassment is actually self-embarrassment: users display shame for their monolingual identity. On the other hand, two different feelings appear when the variables monolingual / monolingualism are considered: celebration of language diversity and pride. The first one is directed to the outside, and mostly connected to the sense of belonging to an imagined community. Pride, on the other hand, is self-pride. In this case, the users display their gratification and fulfilment for their language learning journey and their multilingual identities.
- 56 Given that social media have become one of the main means for self-expression in most Western societies, these findings provide new insights into the current general status of monolingual and multilingual identity portrayals. In creating this type of posts, diverse linguistic identities try to connect with their imagined online communities with which they identify. These results could offer new possibilities for social and educational change. Language learning students might benefit directly from this research as its results may encourage teachers to adjust materials and teaching strategies that take onboard both the present and the imagined identities of the students. Furthermore, the findings show new tendencies that were not observed in former research, such as the turn towards multilingualism as the norm or the employment of Instagram as a safe space for parents of multilingual children to share

their experiences. It also spreads awareness in the community by recognizing the increasing anxiety towards the loss of languages, as it is a repeated concern in the corpus, matching the current politics for the preservation of minority and heritage languages.

- 57 This study also has potential limitations, though. Instagram posts often lack sufficient information to fully develop a study that considers demographic data, and in controlling that type of information, sharper findings towards the construction of identities could have been found (i.e. by relating posts to the demographic information of Instagram users). On the other hand, because of language limitations, such as the investigators' lack of knowledge in other foreign languages that appeared in the posts, the views of many users were not considered.
- 58 However, in the past few years, there has been a slight increase in the use of social media for the study of identities, and the results of this study can contribute to further discussions on the capability of social media platforms to be proper scenarios for linguistic research. Further research might benefit from the exploration of the so-called Gen Z and Millennial linguistic identity construction online, given the rising trend of sharing their language journeys online previously mentioned.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANTHONY Laurence (2019), *AntConc* (Version 3.5.8) [Computer Software], Tokyo: Waseda University, available at <<https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software>>.
- BAKER Paul (2006), *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*, London: Continuum-3PL.
- BARAC Raluca & BIALYSTOC Ellen (2011), "Cognitive Development of Bilingual Children", *Language Teaching*, 44(1), 36–54.
- BIRO Eniko (2019), "Linguistic Identities in the Digital Space", L. Dávid (dir.), *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, Cluj-Napoca: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, 11(2), 37–53, <<https://doi.org/10.2478/ausp-2019-0011>>.
- BLOMMAERT Jan (2010), *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BALDAUF Heike, DEVELOTTE Christine & OLLAGNIER-BELDAME Magali (2017), "The Effects of Social Media on the Dynamics of Identity: Discourse, Interaction and Digital Traces", *Alsic*, 20(1), <<https://doi.org/10.4000/alsic.3004>>.
- DRESSLER Roswita & DRESSLER Anja (2016), "Linguistic Identity Positioning in Facebook Posts During Second Language Study Abroad: One Teen's Language Use, Experience, and Awareness", *The Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(2), 22–43.
- ELLIS Elizabeth (2006), "Monolingualism: The Unmarked case", *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, 7(2), 173–96.
- FLORES Nelson (2013), "The Unexamined Relationship between Neoliberalism and Plurilingualism: A Cautionary Tale", *Tesol Quarterly*, 47(3), 500–20, <<https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.114>>.

- GERVASIO Miriti & KARURI Mary (2019), "Marking Identity through Language in Social Media Discourse by Chuka University Students", *International Journal of Studies in English Language and Literature*, 7(8), 43–52.
- JOHNSON R. Burke & ONWUEGBUZIE Anthony J. (2004), "Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come", *American Educational Research Association*, 33(7), 14–26, <<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014>>.
- JOHNSON R. Burke, ONWUEGBUZIE Anthony J. & TURNER Lisa (2007), "Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research", *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112–33, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806298224>>.
- JOSEPH John E. (2016), "Historical Perspectives on Language and Identity", S. Preece (dir.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*, Basingstoke: Routledge, 19–33.
- KARAGEORGOU Ioanna (2020), *Fitness Discourse on Instagram: A Corpus Linguistic Analysis* (Bachelor's dissertation), Malmö University, <<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mau:diva-21671>> (accessed on 19 April 2023).
- LEE Carmen (2014), "Language Choice and Self-Presentation in Social Media: The Case of University Students in Hong Kong", P. Seargeant & C. Tagg (dir.), *The Languages of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 91–111, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137029317_5>.
- MAGUIRE Moira & DELAHUNT Brid (2017), "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars", *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 9(3).
- MOCANU Vasilica (2019), *A Mixed Method Approach to Identity, Investment, and Language Learning in Study Abroad: The Case of Erasmus Students in Finland, Romania, and Catalonia* (unpublished doctoral thesis), Lleida: Universitat de Lleida, Department of English and Linguistics, <<http://hdl.handle.net/10459.1/67492>>.
- MORGAN Carol & BYRAM Michael (1994), *Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- NORTON Bonny (2013), *Identity and Language Learning. Extending the Conversation*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- PAVLENKO Aneta (2004), "The Making of an American: Negotiation of Identities at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (dir.), *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 34–67.
- TASHAKKORI Abbas & TEDDLIE Charles (dir.) (2003), *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioural Research*, Thousands Oaks: Sage Publications.
- ZAPPAVIGNA Michele (2014), "Enacting Identity in Microblogging through Ambient Affiliation", *Discourse and Communication*, 8(2), 209–28, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481313510816>>.
- ZENG Jing & ABIDIN Crystal (2021), "'#OkBoomer, Time to Meet the Zoomers': Studying the Memefication of Intergenerational Politics on TikTok", *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(16), 2459–81, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1961007>>.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines how monolingual and multilingual portrayals are constructed and displayed by users of the social media platform Instagram. It is based on a corpus of 100 posts, which were labelled with the hashtags #monolingualism or #monolingual. The data were processed with the corpus-analysis software AntConc, quantified, and thematically analyzed.

The results indicate that the posts labelled with the selected hashtags contained information related not only to monolingualism but also to multilingualism. Corpus analysis shows that substantially different value is assigned to monolingual and multilingual identities: while multilingualism is related, mostly, to positive themes, such as the opportunities of language learning, monolingualism is characterized by a majority of posts with a negative value.

The results of the thematic analysis shed light on the most recurrent themes that appeared in the posts related to monolingualism and multilingualism, which fall into four main categories: 1) embodiment of mono- and multilingualism; 2) social and sociolinguistic issues related to mono- and multilingualism; 3) feelings towards mono- and multilingualism; and 4) research-related topics. However, different sub-themes appear within each of these categories depending on the variables monolingualism or multilingualism, enabling us to understand how Instagram users construct identity portrayals based on monolingualism and multilingualism.

Cet article examine comment les représentations monolingues et multilingues sont construites et affichées par les utilisateurs du réseau social Instagram. Il se base sur un corpus de 100 publications, qui ont été étiquetées avec les hashtags #monolingualism ou #monolingual. Les données ont été traitées avec le logiciel d'analyse de corpus AntConc, quantifiées et analysées de manière thématique.

Les résultats indiquent que les publications étiquetées avec les hashtags sélectionnés contiennent des informations liées non seulement au monolinguisme, mais aussi au multilinguisme. L'analyse du corpus a montré qu'une valeur substantiellement différente était attribuée aux identités monolingue et multilingue : alors que le multilinguisme est lié, la plupart du temps, à des sujets positifs, le monolinguisme est caractérisé par une majorité de messages ayant une valeur négative.

Les résultats de l'analyse thématique mettent en lumière les sujets les plus récurrents apparus dans les publications relatives au monolinguisme et au multilinguisme, qui sont liés à quatre catégories principales : 1) l'incarnation du mono- et du multilinguisme ; 2) les questions sociales et sociolinguistiques ; 3) les sentiments envers le mono- et le multilinguisme ; et 4) les sujets liés à la recherche. Cependant, différents sous-thèmes apparaissent au sein de chacune de ces catégories en fonction des variables monolinguisme ou multilinguisme, ce qui nous permet de comprendre la manière dont les utilisateurs d'Instagram construisent les représentations identitaires des monolingues et des multilingues.

INDEX

Keywords: monolingualism, multilingualism, social media, identity, Instagram

Mots-clés: monolinguisme, multilinguisme, médias sociaux, identité, Instagram

AUTHORS

VASILICA MOCANU

Universidad de Salamanca, LINDES Research Group

vasim@usal.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3879-1886>

VALERIA GONZÁLEZ

Universidad de Salamanca

valeriarojas@usal.es

IZASKUN ELORZA

Universidad de Salamanca, LINDES Research Group

iea@usal.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9807-4811>